

MIDDLE GRADES SPOTLIGHT

A Newsletter for California's Middle Grades Educator

Volume 1, Issue 2

Spring 2003

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The Challenge of Teaching English Learners in Middle School



Taking Center Stage (TCS)

Recommendation #12: Provide appropriate and accelerated interventions based on the results of relevant assessment instruments.



Teaching English learners in the middle grades is undoubtedly one of the most significant challenges of middle grades education. Students in this age group (usually grades six through eight) must meet a high level of academic rigor at about the same time they are developmentally discovering their social selves, going through puberty, and challenging their boundaries both at home and at school. To meet these needs, schools have created a wide variety of adaptations and unique programs, which include implementing appropriate and accelerated interventions for English learners to help them achieve and ultimately be prepared to take the California High School Exit Exam.

California has about 1.75 million middle grade students. About 17 percent of that population is identified as English learners and that percentage continues to grow. In California, where there are 56 different primary languages spoken, the task becomes even more challenging.

(Continued on page 2)

Update on Standards-Based Report Cards for Middle Schools Not on Center Stage Yet!

As California middle schools align their curriculum, student assignments, and assessments to the California content standards and grades seven through eight SBE-adopted instructional materials, they are seeking new ways to report how students are doing relative to standards. Standards-based schools across the nation are looking for clear and logical ways to communicate to parents, teachers, and students the importance of teaching and learning state content standards.

California's elementary schools are ahead in the process. Middle and high schools are lagging behind, conceivably because of the different organizational structure, instructional delivery, and the traditional grading system employed.

(Continued on page 4)

Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)

Key SDAIE Strategies



Instruction

- Focus instruction on the California State Board of Education (SBE)-adopted, grade-level, academic content standards.
- Use differentiated instruction, modeling, and demonstrating to assist understanding as outlined in the kindergarten through grade eight SBE-adopted instructional materials.

- Choose instructional strategies consistent with students' level of English proficiency.

Teachers

- Modify rate of speech, repeat, rephrase, and explain.
 - Check frequently for comprehension.
- (Continued on page 2)

The Challenge of Teaching English Learners

(Continued from page 1)

Passed in 1999, Proposition 227 has two goals:

- Teach students in English
- Support the students' academic content learning needs

According to the proposition, "All children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English." In adopting the regulations to implement Proposition 227, the SBE defined the Structured English Immersion (SEI) program for students with "less than reasonable fluency" to be

SDAIE Strategies, (Continued from page 1)

- Use gestures and paralinguistic clues to assist understanding.
- Build lessons from prior knowledge using the instructional materials.
- Familiarize students with academic language and text structures. Actively develop vocabulary.
- Increase metacognitive awareness—what is being learned and why.
- Ask students to verbalize in speech or in writing. Help them find alternative ways to express difficult ideas, such as using visual representations.
- Wait a sufficient amount of time for students to think and then respond to questions.
- Summarize and review frequently—involve students in the process.

Students

- Demonstrate understanding in a variety of ways.
- Participate in a variety of interactive learning strategies, such as hands-on, reciprocal teaching, team teaching, and pair-sharing work.

Materials

- Use English Learners lessons and strategies found in grades seven through eight SBE-adopted instructional materials.
- Ensure that visual aids (graphs, charts, pictures, realia, maps, manipulatives, etc.) are readily available to assist learning.

(Refer to *Taking Center Stage*, Chapter 10, Appendix A.)

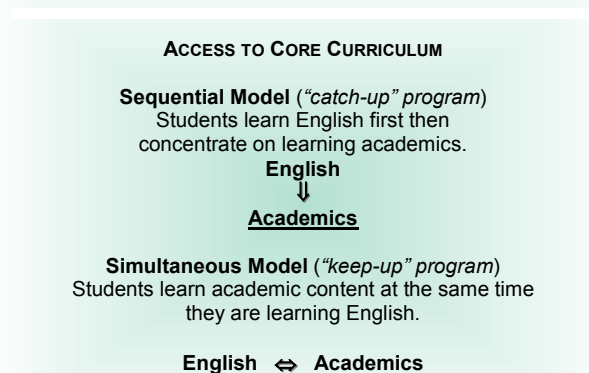
taught in "nearly all English" and as a "structured and systematic English language acquisition process."

The English-Language Arts (ELA) Content Standards, which were adopted by the SBE in 1995, provide the rigor of what all kindergarten through grade twelve students need to know at each grade level. The English Language Development (ELD) Standards, developed in 1999, are to be used as an "on ramp" to the ELA standards. The SBE-adopted ELA materials provide instructional guidance for teachers of English learners.

To assess English learners progress in acquiring English, California developed and annually administers the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), which is based on the ELD Standards. Seventy percent of middle grades English learners taking the CELDT in 2001 were identified at the beginning and intermediate levels of English acquisition. Students at these levels require appropriate placement and instruction in classes that meet their specific needs with significant classroom support. Stanford University researchers Hakuta, Butler, & Witt found that young, non-English speaking elementary students require two to five years to become proficient in oral English. Acquiring vocabulary and proficiency in written English takes longer.

Schools have a dual obligation for serving English learners: to teach English and to teach academic content. There are two models for achieving these goals. One can be described as a Sequential Model and the other can be described as a Simultaneous Model. Middle schools will often use a mixture of both models because of the short timeline for mastering rigorous content. If a district chooses to use a Sequential Model, the district must develop a "catch-up" plan to ensure that all students learn English and required academic content.

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(Adapted from the California Department of Education's (CDE) School and District Accountability Web site. < http://www.cde.ca.gov/ccpdiv/eng_learn/ >)

The Challenge of Teaching English Learners

(Continued from page 2)

For students who are lagging in grade-level proficiency, extended experiences and major interventions may be required before and after school for these students to be successful in middle school and beyond. All English learners require strong, coordinated, academic instructional strategies and supports in all required subject areas.

Research-based recommendations for effectively teaching English learners mirror what research says is good for all students--particularly young adolescents, who are restless and need a high level of activity, engagement, and challenge. The kinds of school and classroom programs described in *Taking Center Stage* are also the most appropriate educational strategies for English learners and include the following criteria:

- Rigorous alignment of instruction to both the ELA/ELD and grade level content standards in math, history, and science
- Frequent, on-going standards-based monitoring of each student's progress
- Caring and personalized support to students
- Differentiated instruction
- Sufficient time and resources for supportive learning

There is no single right answer on how to teach English learners given the mix of young adolescent development, language acquisition needs, and academic content rigor. Educators need to learn from one another the best practices that teach English learners quickly and effectively while helping them stay focused on the individual needs of each student. (See "In the Spotlight" feature that follows.)

Works Cited and Resources

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Note: When the Middle Grades Office reviews data for California's middle schools, we not only look for evidence of overall progress, but look for schools that are effectively serving the needs of their special populations. We invited Carpinteria Middle School to describe its continued academic growth with their English learners subgroup. Their story reflects what researched recommendations suggest.

Carpinteria Middle School



Carpinteria Middle School

Carpinteria, California

—One of California's 2001 Distinguished Schools

English learners at Carpinteria Middle School (CMS) have shown good academic progress over the years. The question is often asked, "What are you doing to achieve these results?" The short answer is our primary focus is on the individual student.

- The first key is focusing on EACH English learner in the school. An important part of our program is monitoring the progress of each English learner and providing timely interventions before the student gets too far behind. A spreadsheet with important data for each English learner is used to monitor progress, determine appropriate classes, and monitor the overall effectiveness of the services provided. The sheet is updated throughout the year, and during scheduling time, it provides a clear picture of the number and types of classes to offer.
- A second key is recognizing the need to continually evaluate the effectiveness of programs, classes, and support services offered. Staff must possess a willingness to get rid of those programs that are not working and replace them with programs that have a greater potential for success. Throughout the

(Continued on page 4)

SCHOOL PROFILE:

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
701 students (9% mobility)
55% Hispanic or Latino
732 API – (up+ 21 points)
31% English learners
34% reduced/free meals

Carpinteria Middle School, continued

(Continued from page 3)

year, we monitor and evaluate how well the new class offerings are working. When the process of putting together the master schedule for the next year begins, we once again look at what is working and what additions are needed based on individual English learner progress.

- Third, a lot of time and energy is spent on helping all staff understand the needs of English learners. Too often teachers, who are unaware of the language acquisition process, feel that English learners who have a decent command of oral English should be able to function in their classroom if they just try harder. These teachers do not understand that just because the student can speak English, it does not mean they have the academic language skills needed to function in an all-English class with no supports. As we work with our teachers to help them understand that the problems English learners are experiencing are in large part due to poor academic language skills, not a lack of effort, they gain a different perspective of the English learners and change their teaching style to compensate for the limited academic language.

As our teaching and support staff have become more aware of the language acquisition process and the role they play, the better they are able to adjust their teaching style to support continual progress of their English learners. The results have been impressive.

Bob Keatinge, Principal

Key Supports for English Learners at Carpinteria

(Excerpt from CMS' 2001 Distinguished School application.)

1. English learners scoring below grade level are provided a second intensive reading/language arts class in addition to their regular English classes.
2. Staff develop a plan to gradually phase each student into English-only classes. Students are given individual supports along the way.
3. The school provides before and after school tutoring for students experiencing difficulty in core classes.
4. The school operates (with the feeder high school) a Saturday "Bridge" program that develops educational supports for students identified as "disconnected" or "alienated." The program works closely with families to increase at-home support.
5. All teachers are required to have Bilingual or Crosscultural Language & Academic Development certification.
6. School support staff are bilingual; home communication is handled in both English and Spanish.
7. The school provides students with full-time credentialed academic guidance counselor and two full-time youth specialists.
8. Migrant education funds have been leveraged to provide English learners with strong academic potential to become eligible for the Gifted & Talented Education program.

Update on Standards-Based Report Cards for Middle Schools

(Continued from page 1)

Developing a standards-based report card (SBRC) requires a new way of thinking for teachers, students, and parents. Parents and teachers "understand" better that with which they are familiar and comfortable. Most parents and teachers were not educated in a system based on state standards. As such, this new student achievement report is a learning and growing experience for all stakeholders.

Middle schools moving to SBRC are finding that the change means more than a "new look" for their traditional report card. Since the achievement report is a reflection of teaching and learning in a standards-based system, the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the standards must precede this final step. Aligning everything to standards requires a thorough understanding of the process, training, implementation, and ongoing refinement. This is not an easy or quick task to complete.

Last November, the Middle Grades Office queried its MIDNET List Serve to see who was implementing a middle school SBRC. Of the thirty-eight responses received, most middle schools wanted to know--of the schools that responded with a "yes"--would they be willing to share. Since middle school experience with SBRC is extremely sparse and the pioneers in the field are still grappling with issues related to implementation, they have declined the opportunity to share at this time.

There is a middle school prototype report card in the CDE publication, *Taking Center Stage*, which includes many of the elements districts are currently using and considering to develop their SBRC. The prototype is informative and not intended to be prescriptive for schools and districts. Its purpose in the publication was to "jump start" professional dialogue and planning for consistent assessments of student performance across classrooms and throughout the state. There is significant discussion of why standards-based reporting is important and what the issues are in moving from one system to another. Next fall the Middle Grades Office will once again query MIDNET and revisit the successes and challenges of SBRC transition.

Why do we need an SBRC? Standards-based report cards help parents to understand what their child is expected to learn, and how well he/she is meeting those goals. Traditionally, teachers have

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Update on Standards-Based Report Cards

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graded students in a variety of ways and considered a number of different factors when deriving a student's grade. Few teachers assigning grades used the same criteria.

Standards-based assessments distinguish high-level skills and understanding from work habits and behaviors. While students must be held accountable for citizenship, work habits, and other social behaviors, evaluation of these areas is distinct from performance in academic content.

What are the advantages of an effective SBRC?

- Student performance levels are tied specifically to what students should know on content standards in all classes across the school and district if everything is aligned. Subjective bias is minimized.
- Parents, when informed, have a clear and logical understanding of how their child is progressing toward content proficiency.
- Severe deficiencies on specific standards are not masked by a lump-sum course grade of a "C." Deficiencies can be targeted and addressed.
- Administrators and policy makers need not wrestle with "grade inflation" nor explain to stakeholders why students receiving "A" or "B" grades were unable to meet benchmarks on the standardized state and local assessments.
- Report cards that measure student progress against a consistent benchmark enable all students to meet high standards. Using state standards helps ensure that all students are assessed and graded by the same criteria and not on a bell curve.

Some words of wisdom from pioneers in progress:

*** Build consensus with teachers, parents and students.** The successful transition to a report card that reflects success on grade-level standards requires the acceptance and support of teachers, parents, students, and the community. Getting this level of acceptance requires deliberate planning and extensive public engagement. It takes time to plan for the expected stages of change, to make the change to the new grade reporting system, and to plan ongoing communications before, during, and for each school year after the transition is complete. It is

a doomed project without widespread consensus and collaboration.

*** Use teacher leaders to build support.** Teachers will need to be fully knowledgeable about the transition from traditional grading to reporting and evaluating progress toward standards proficiency. Developing a student performance report will be different from awarding conventional grades. This new format may or may not continue to use letter grades. The meaning of grades on the new report card will likely differ for students and parents. Teachers must be able to comfortably communicate the differences. Site staff will have to work closely with parents and central office personnel to develop or adapt new formats for reporting proficiency and maintaining consistency throughout the school/district.

*** Work carefully with technology.** Site staff may have to develop the skills needed to use technology-based (even manual) formats. Some commercial vendors already have grading software available for schools. Use of technology and training of staff will be important steps in planning the transition as well as in issuing student grade reports. Missteps with technology can earn bad press coverage and needless skepticism among teachers and parents.

*** Build parent understanding.** For the new report card to be effective, parents need to know what state standards students will be taught in each class and at each grade level. Parents also need to be clear on how teachers will assess the quality of learning, work habits, and behavior. Student-led parent conferences are one way to make sure students, as well as their parents, understand the requirements for each class.

*** Be prepared for parents who don't receive the message.** Second language parents may have difficulty understanding the language of the SBRC. It is important to avoid educational jargon and to explain the reforms in ways that make second-language parents comfortable and remain involved at school. Be prepared to respond to parents who have not taken the new standards-based reforms seriously. It will be important to have a plan for explaining the new report card to all parents in a variety of ways and on several occasions during the school year. Perhaps as parents become familiar with SBRC at their elementary school, the path for middle schools will be easier to follow.

(See upcoming TCS workshops on SBRC. Refer to "Looking Ahead" found on page 6.)

Update on Standards-Based Report Cards

(Continued from page 5)

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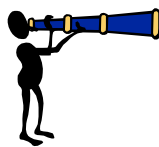
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Looking Ahead ...

Year 2003

**Feb. 28-
Mar. 2**

NMSA Middle Level Essentials: Literacy, Assessment & High Performing Middle Schools—Kansas City, MO
< <http://www.nmsa.org/> >

Mar. 4*

TCS Northern CA Workshop at Sacramento COE. Kathryn Catania will share standards-based learning and reporting experiences. Contact SCOPE at 916-228-3908

Mar. 6-9

California League of Middle Schools: Beyond the Basics Conference—San Diego, CA < <http://www.clms.net/> >

Mar. 14-18

National Conference on Family Literacy—Long Beach, CA. Contact Infoline at 1-877-FAMILIT-1 or < <http://www.famlit.org/> >

Mar. 24-26

Professional Development Conference Evidence of Excellence through Equity—Palm Springs, CA. < <http://www.edualliance.org/> >

Apr. 3-4

CA Middle Grades Partnership Network Coordinators Mtg.—Napa, CA

Apr. 8-9

On the Right Track: Strategies from Improving Schools—Los Angeles, CA.
< <http://www.wested.org/pub/docs/489> >

Apr. 12*

TCS Central CA Workshop at Stanislaus COE. Keynoter is Dr. Debra Pickering on *Grading & Reporting With Standards*. Contact SCOPE at 209-525-4845 or 209-525-4926

*TCS Workshops are funded in part through federal ESEA Title 6 funds.

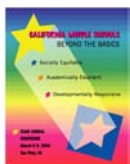


Resources & News



Taking Center Stage Workshops

Taking Center Stage ACT II—focus workshops are being conducted throughout the state this spring. See "Looking Ahead" feature for dates.



California League of Middle Schools (CLMS) Annual Conference Beyond the Basics on March 6-9, 2003, in San Diego, CA.
< <http://www.clms.net/> >

Taking Center Stage: A Commitment to Standards-based Education for California's Middle Grades Students is a CDE handbook for middle school educators. < <http://www.cde.ca.gov/middle/tcs.html> >



The latest information about California Standards and Assessment. < <http://www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/> >

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